

Workplace Inclusion during Times of Economic Turmoil

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The year 2009 has already proven to be a year of economic depression. Banks are being bailed out; the housing market crashed; the DOW index sank to an all time low of below 7,000 - for the first time in over ten years; and the levels of layoffs and unemployment are at an all time high. Since December 2008, both regional and state unemployment rates are universally higher than previous counts. In the United States, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have record increases in both over-the-month and -year unemployment rates as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. National unemployment rates rose from 6.8 to 7.2 percent in December alone, and this increase is 2.3 percentage points over last year (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/laus.nr0.htm>).

The same unemployed individual's, are losing their homes, savings; and those individuals still fortunate enough to be employed are concerned with job security. Given the state of affairs in the United States (US) we must ask ourselves what steps and/or actions can we make as a country in order to help secure and/or keep employed the average working aged individual. We must look for ways in which to optimize the added value of human capital within organizations while at the same time offering some type of security for the individual employee.

While recent trends across the last ten years have been to encourage job-sharing, professional development, and organizational mobility (the ability to change positions within the organization); empirical research findings indicate that these trends do not necessarily provide for lowered levels of turnover, or higher levels of job loyalty, or job security. In fact, to the

research has shown the greater the expected mobility the lower the level of loyalty and expected employee tenure has been documented.

Numerous research studies have documented the benefits of professional development, employee training programs, and other similar programs. Companies have recently begun to view human capital as an investment of the human kind, upon which they expect a return. Companies invest in their employees by providing their employees with on-the-job-training, skill and developmental training, cross-job training. Companies invest time and money into training programs and expect their training dollars to provide a return on investment when those newly trained and/or retrained employees apply their newly acquired skills to their present job.

However, studies indicate that today's employee expects that they should be organizationally mobile and employees that perceive organizational mobility as being required of them act differently than those employees that have a sense of organizational job security (Pearce and Randel, 2004). In fact, Pearce and Randel (2004) proposed that employee's expectations of organizational mobility are dysfunctional for the development of an inclusive workplace. More specifically, the widespread belief that organizations should provide interesting jobs and opportunities for skill development has resulted in a phenomenon called the 'employability trend'. The basic tenet of this trend is that the skills and opportunities afforded to any individual employee will result in a mobile career.

Unfortunately, this recent trend toward 'employability has had the negative effect of a drastic drop in job security. "American corporations indicated that between 1987 and 1993 the proportion offering no job security to any of their employees increased from 47 to 63 percent (Pearce & Randel, 2004)." Employee's feelings towards job security can be harmful to the perception they have towards to company. This can lead to negative feelings at work that can

lead to decreased morale and a hostile work environment towards others. Inclusion efforts can be hindered by such negative attitudes sparked by anger or fear.

References

- Electronic Source: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/laus.nr0.htm> Retrieved March 6, 2009.
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